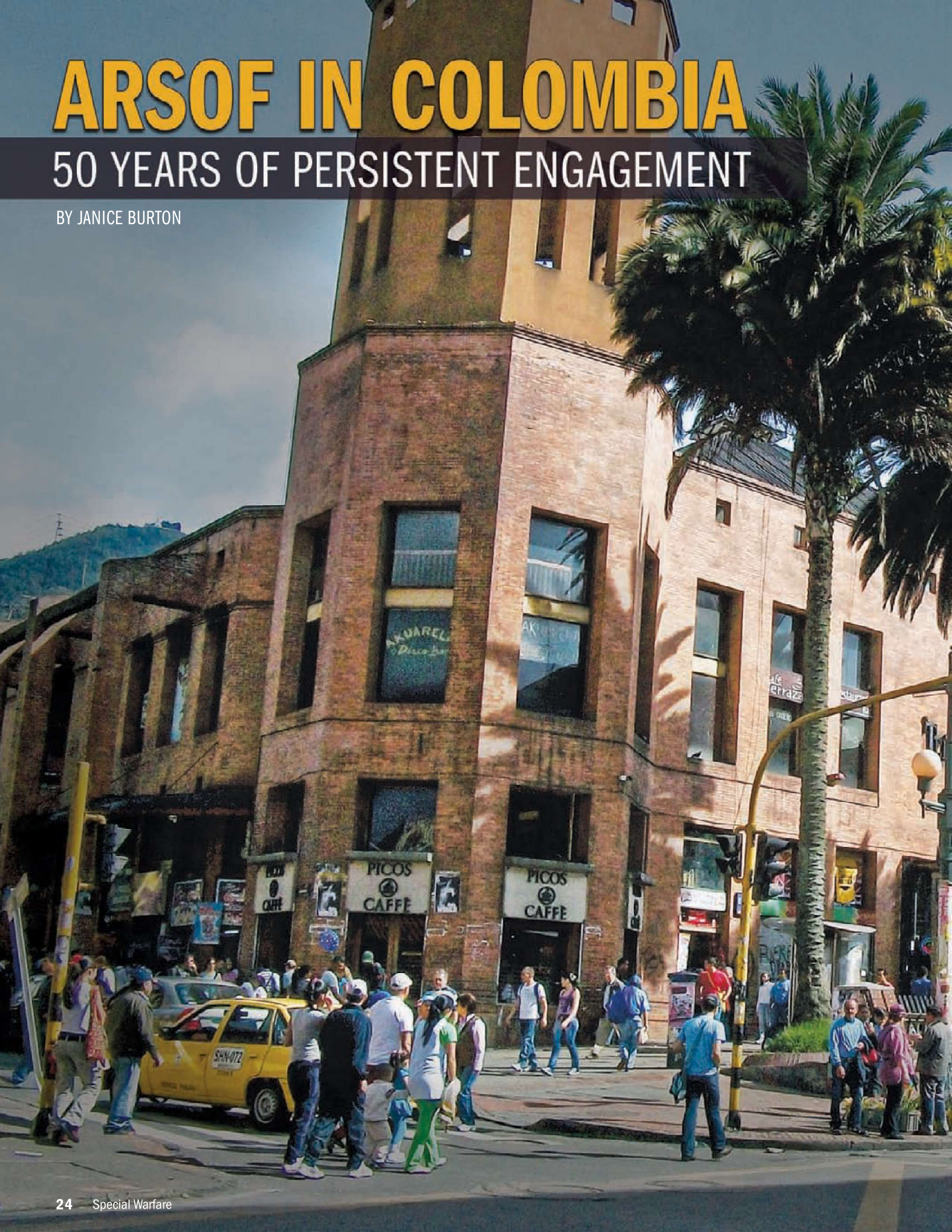
ARSOF IN COLOMBIA

50 YEARS OF PERSISTENT ENGAGEMENT

BY JANICE BURTON



Colombia is a country of contrast. You have only to make the drive from the bustling center of commerce that is Bogota to Tolamaida to realize you aren't in Kansas anymore. Walking the streets of the Zona Rosa in downtown Bogota, there are tangible signs of a newfound security among the populace. Diners crowd outdoor patios. High-end shops do a brisk business. But evidence of the country's problems is found on every corner, as members of the Colombian security forces stand guard, weapons at the ready.

This is the reality of Colombia. Security is in the eye of the beholder. But considering that as late as 2000, many considered the country a failed state; violence in the form of bombings and kidnappings by insurgent groups like the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), the Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (ELN) and from paramilitary groups associated with the drug cartels was a way of life. In 1999, non-government agencies operating in Colombia reported that the country had the fourth-largest population of internally displaced persons in the world.[1] The ongoing struggle between government troops, insurgents and paramilitary groups associated with drug trade forced as many as 300,000 people, mostly women and children, from their homes.[2]

It was into that environment that the U.S. started pumping large sums of money into Colombia under the Clinton Administration through Plan Colombia. Plan Colombia, approved in Washington, D.C., and put forward by the Government of Colombia under then President Pastrana, was touted as an "integrated strategy to meet the most pressing challenges confronting the county."[3] Where the plan failed is that it focused solely on combating the narcotics industry as a means of reviving the faltering Colombian economy and bringing security. It ignored entirely the insurgency that had plagued the country for most of the past century.

In support of Plan Colombia, the administration of U.S. President Bill Clinton pledged more than $1.6 billion in aid aimed at fighting the illicit drug trade, increasing the rule of law, protecting human rights, expanding economic development and instituting judicial reform. There were five central components to Plan Colombia:

- Improving governing capacity and respect for human rights.
- Expansion of counternarcotics operations into Southern Colombia, which was the stronghold of the cartels.
- Alternative economic development, which provided economic alternatives to small farmers to turn them away from the production of coca and opium.
- Increased interdiction in Colombia and the region.
- Assistance for the Colombian National Police to continue efforts at eradication.[4]

The plan also called for Colombia to seek a peace agreement with its insurgent groups, but did not allocate any funding to help the Colombian security forces counter the insurgency should negotiations fail.

Plan Colombia, as it was initially implemented, also failed to address the lack of security and the lack of widespread government presence meeting the needs of the populace.

While the over arching end state desired by Plan Colombia was not recognized, it was an impetus for change, particularly in the Colombian military. With increased funding and access to U.S. advisers, the leadership of the Colombian armed forces recognized the lack of a strategic focus in combatting the nation's internal enemies and instituted a reform process that "affected everything from recruiting, to military schooling, to assignment policies, to structure, to operational art. The result was a reclaiming of a strategic initiative."[5]

In May 2002, President Alvaro Uribe Velez was elected by a popular mandate. Uribe recognized that change in Colombia could not happen without a constant state presence in the lives of the Colombian people. To that end, Uribe changed the focus of Plan Colombia, turning from the Washington-driven program to a plan derived in Colombia, by Colombians for Colombians. The new plan, the Democratic Security and Defense Policy, which was officially released in 2003 and is still the driving force behind today's Colombian security policy, focused on security as the key to improving the lives of the people of Colombia.

The new policy followed a simple line of thinking:

- The lack of security was at the root of Colombia's problems.
- The void in security was a result by a lack of state presence in large portions of the country.
- The state needed to step into the void.[6]

The new policy recognized that the illicit drug trade and its associated violence were not the only threats to the security of the nation. It put a new emphasis on countering the insurgency and the violence in the form of kidnappings and homicides that it engendered. The key points of the new policy were stated clearly: "Security is not regarded primarily as the security of the citizens without assistance of the state. Rather, it is the protection of the citizen and democracy by the state with the solidarity and cooperation of the whole of society."[7]

In order to provide that kind of far-reaching security, the administration had to bring security to the hinterlands and did so by implementing a consolidation plan, which brought a state presence to those ungoverned areas of the country. Ten years later, the consolidation of Colombia is still ongoing. It is a tenuous process where losses and gains are marked by inches rather than miles, but that was recognized early on when the plan was introduced. Announcing its strategic approach to providing security to the country, the plan outlined three key strategies:

- A gradual restoration of state presence, authority and institutions in strategically important areas.
- An enduring presence by the armed forces, the solado campesino (local forces) and National Police Carabineros will be maintained to provide for the security of the populace
- The reestablishment of the normal operations of a justice system, local governance, broadening of state services and sustainable development.[8]

Key to the success of the Consolidation Plan was the ability of the Colombian Armed Forces and National Police to successfully execute a successful counterinsurgency plan against the insurgent groups, the paramilitary units and those involved in the illicit drug trade. The leadership within the Colombian military had been refining exactly this kind of plan in the years prior to Uribe's election. Throughout his two terms in office, the military flourished and became the face of the state throughout most of the Colombia, enjoying a high approval rate from the average Colombian citizen. The plan had some immediate and tangible results. According to official government statistical information from August 2004, in two years, homicides, kidnappings and terrorist attacks in Colombia decreased by as much as 50 percent — the lowest levels in almost 20 years. In 2003, there were 7,000 fewer homicides than in 2002 — a decrease of 27 percent. By April 2004, the government had established a permanent police or military presence in every Colombian municipality for the first time in decades.

The Uribe administration had a mandate from the people to pursue a war against those who were disrupting the nation's security. That was shown in Uribe's second election, which required a change to the country's constitution. During Uribe's administration the military made great strides in establishing security in the outlying areas of the country. Uribe's successor, President Juan Santos capitalized on the strength of the military to provide security, while changing the focus of the government.

Since taking office in late 2010, Santos has focused more on social and economic reforms than the provision of security, relying on the gains made by the security forces in the preceding eight years to keep the fragile peace. Reducing poverty is high on his agenda, and restoration of land to those forcibly displaced by

armed groups has become his signature issue.

To that end, members of the Colombian Armed Forces and National Police are continuing to pursue the Consolidation Plan (Sword of Honor) aided by their U.S. advisers, while U.S. government agencies and other nongovernmental agencies seek to bring humanitarian assistance and economic development into the contested areas. Each of the players in the consolidation plan has a unique role and mission from development efforts of the U.S. Agency for International Development, to the eradication mission of the Department of State's Narcotic Affairs Section to the training/advising mission of the U.S. military.

DISPLACED A stark contrast to the bustling city, many rural villages of Colombia are plagued with poverty, homelessness (primarily of women and children) and a lack of security. The Consolidation Plan brings security forces to these areas so that agencies can enter to provide aid and investment in the area. *UN photo*

Interagency

For many working in the interagency, progress in Colombia has been very visible. What is most apparent is that there is now a political will to make changes in the country that did not exist 15 years. Over the past decade, the government, which at one point was considered fairly corrupt and was believed by many to be under the control of the cartels has changed dramatically. Those who have served long-term in the country with various government agencies have witnessed the changes first hand.

The biggest changes have been over the last 10 years, and have been accomplished by the administrations of Uribe and Santos. According to an employee with one of the NGOs, the Uribe and the Santos administrations' desire to create security and economic development within the country proved that the political will is greater now than at any other time.

He noted that without the political will, many government agencies would not be working in Colombia and would not have formed partnership with their host-nation counterparts, whom he gives credit for many of the changes in the country. Colombia has been a work in progress, with the U.S. pouring large sums of money into the country. But he stressed that the job was not complete, noting that with the draw down of the U.S. budget, it is important that those who make decisions concerning funding understand that America's work in Colombia is not done yet.

Colombians are taking the lead in many efforts, but they are not at the point of sustaining the efforts without continued U.S. support, including consolidation efforts; a counterinsurgency strategy that focuses its efforts on geographic space. There are 51 municipalities — about 11 percent of Colombia's land mass — in contention, and it is in this area that the war will be won. That is where the majority of U.S. effort should be synchronized and placed.

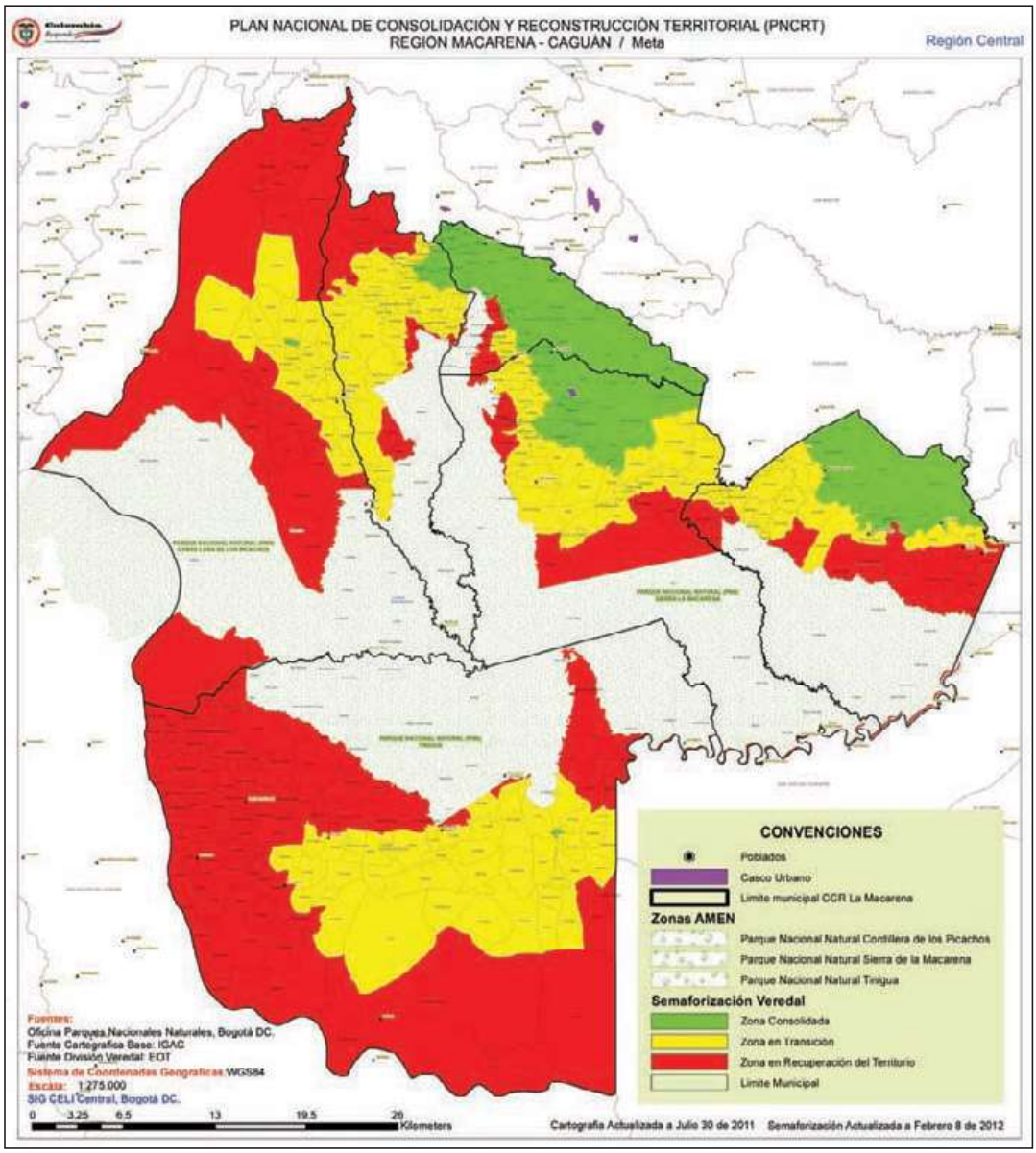
In the past U.S. agencies looked at Colombia's problems through very different viewpoints, with the military focusing on the FARC; while other government agencies, like NAS, looked at the problems created by the drug cartels; and other agencies like USAID worked in development. That has changed over the past years as all American governmental entities have made a concerted effort to pursue a different path, adopting a whole-of-government approach.

To that end, all U.S. government agencies working in Colombia hold a weekly synchronization meeting every Tuesday morning. The meeting has a twofold purpose: the first is transparency and, more importantly, it gives each entity the ability to receive feedback and align its efforts with those being undertaken by other agencies. The geographic focus of the consolidation plan makes it much easier to pinpoint and synchronize all U.S. efforts.

While agencies like USAID have not always had a comfortable relationship with the military that is not the case in Colombia. The integration of the military into the everyday social scheme of the country with an expanded presence has made association with military activities meaningful.

The non-military personnel working in Colombia recognize that people respond to the military presence often begging for them not to leave. The Colombian Armed Forces are the de facto face of the state in some places.

The military presence allows government agencies and nongovernmental organizations to go into formerly contested areas. Under the consolidation plan, the districts are marked as red, green or yellow. The red districts are in active combat and no development projects occur. When they tip into the yellow phase, development can begin to occur and USAID can begin investing in the district.



PLAN NACIONAL DE CONSOLIDACIÓN Under the consolidation plan districts are marked as red, green or yellow. The red districts are in active combat and no development projects occur. When they tip into the yellow phase, development can begin to occur. *USAID graphic*

It is not wise for agencies to invest a lot of time and money into areas where the FARC still has control. If an agency puts a teacher in a school located in a district that is red or builds a clinic, the FARC will take credit for the improvements, which is counterproductive to the mission.

When a district tips to yellow, various U.S. government agencies teamed with members of the Colombian Regional Consolidation Management Teams go into the area and conduct a needs analysis. They evaluate the needs and respond quickly to the most pressing. By addressing the needs of the populace, the people come to recognize that the state is a better long-term partner for them than the insurgents.

The Regional Consolidation Teams, like the provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan, have a variety of coordinators, who meet with members of the community, hear their concerns and determine the greatest needs. They then petition the government to meet those needs in that area.

Analysis and the evaluations are very difficult in terms of getting funding and in terms of security. A district that is yellow is still straddling the fence. It could swing back to red. To win the support of the people all of these encounters are Colombian led. The staff at the support center is Colombian, which helps get buy-in from the local populace and get government support to meet the needs in these areas. While U.S. agencies may help at the outset, Colombians have stepped up to manage the system, allowing U.S. personnel to take a step back.

It is important to note that providing a whole-of-government approach to the problems in Colombia is a very deliberate process. It requires patience. No plan is perfect.

NAS

The Narcotics Affairs Section within the embassy has been a crucial partner for U.S. special-operations forces. While in the past, success for the section has been weighed by the number of coca fields eradicated and farmers who turn from production, the agency is taking a different approach.

A major investment has been in creating a top-notch training center for the Colombian National Police, who are central in the fight against illicit trafficking and narcoterrorism. The center, which is located on what used to be a ranch in Espinal, has received much of its funding from the International Narcotics Bureau of the State Department.

The Colombia Bureau is the largest foreign-assistance program in operation. It is, in fact, the largest narcotics operation in the world, and is funded by the U.S. Congress. Its role is moving from law enforcement to assistance, rule of law and institution building. That doesn't mean that the bureau doesn't focus on interdiction and eradication, rather it focuses on ensuring that Colombian security forces have the capacity to deal with those issues.

FORTIFIED *Left:* The headquarters building on the campus of the Colombian National Police training center in Espinal. The training center, funded largely by NAS, provides top-notch facilities and equipment for training police. *U.S. Army photo; Right:* Colombian rural police were often in contested areas long-term without dedicated police stations. Projects to build fortified police stations give them permenant presence and protection against attack. *Courtesy photo*

All of the activities of the bureau are synchronized with the U.S. Military Group, Colombia. Members of the NAS staff are frequently partnered with U.S. special-operations forces. They work closely with members of the civil-military support element and military-information support teams to deal with environmental issues associated with aerial eradication. Civil Affairs teams hold medical civic-action programs in villages where eradication is or will occur. The CA teams ensure that the local populace suffers no ill effects from the eradication, while the MIST educates them on the herbicides that are used in the eradication.

Their strongest alliance with ARSOF is with the advisers and trainers from the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne). Over the past year, NAS, in concert with 7th SFG(A) has contributed to the development of the Rural Policing program by planning and overseeing a historic joint training between the Colombian National Police's Carabineros and the Colombian Special Forces Commandos. In Colombia, the police element must go on missions with the commandos because they have arrest power for both the insurgents and the drug traffickers.

The training was not without its difficulties. The Colombian National Police refused to allow the training to occur at their state-of-the-art training center. Instead, SF trainers, accompanied by trainers from the center had to create mobile training teams to go out and do the training in the field.

This training was significant in that the Soldiers of the 7th SF Group acting as trainers served as a bridge between the two groups, who actually don't get along.

The training was also significant because it also signaled an increase in fortified police stations in the contested areas. The Rural Police often stay in the contested areas for long periods of times without dedicated police stations. The goal is to build fortified police stations in the areas, which create a permanent presence in the area. The stations frequently come under attack, so NAS is also funding projects to fortify the stations.

The Base Security Program was initially initiated by two retired U.S. Special Forces Soldiers, and has been ongoing for four or five years.

The bases from which the Junglas were operating frequently came under fire. Many of the houses the force was stationed in had no real protection, even though they were providing key support in the consolidation zones. The program is designed to put up walls and towers to offer fortifications for the force.

A recent attack on one of the fortified facilities by the FARC only resulted in slight shrapnel damage after two hours of active combat. Prior to the fortification program, the facility and the force stationed there would have been wiped out.

It is a priority to ensure that the Colombian forces who are operating in the contested consolidation zones have a survivable position in which to live and operate. By providing a safe haven, the bunker mentality can be eliminated and the security forces can begin to go out and work in the community. It's Community Policing 101.

As the bases are fortified, the insurgents change their tactics. In recent months, mortar attacks on the stations have become popular. Initially the fire on the stations was indiscriminate, but over time, the insurgents have honed their ability to fire on the stations and now do so on a regular basis with a great deal of success. Improving the stations to the point that these attacks do minimum damage is complicated.

The fortification program is not without challenges. Depending on who owns the property, permission has to be gained from the landlord to build these fortified stations and create stand-off areas, which is often limited by other landlords. Additionally, water purification centers are being placed in all of the stations in order to provide potable water. A number of officers have died from waterborne illnesses. The systems are big enough to provide water for the local community, as well. This helps build rapport within the community, who in turn shares information about the FARC.

Getting the populace to recognize the government as their hope versus the FARC or drug traffickers takes work. Key to that are programs conducted by the CMSE and the MIST, both of which are nascent in the Colombian military.

U.S. Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Soldiers are working closely with their counterparts to develop the capacity of their partnered force for the conduct of independent operations. In initial operations, the U.S. CA teams took the lead hosting a medical civic-action program, with their partnered force supporting the activity. Today, the Colombian forces conduct the MEDCAPs on their own, the U.S. forces supporting them.

By working closely with the U.S. elements, the Colombians can get to a point where they can address the needs of their people and opens doors U.S. forces and agencies couldn't get into on their own.

HIGH VALUE TARGET A leaflet used in the campaign to locate the FARC's leader, Alfonso Cano. Information related to Cano's whereabouts was derived from citizens who were influenced by the campaign to report. *Courtesy graphic*

MIST

The same is happening with the MIST.

Captain Maurice Valentine has been working closely with the developing Colombian PSYOP force for more than a year. The team he has on the ground has been there eight months.

"Everything we do is in support of the Colombian National Plan for Consolidation and is aimed at security, support to the populace and providing a state presence," he said. "For us, security is more of a support effort, working with the Colombian National Police and Armed Forces."

U.S. MISO teams working in Colombia have a very straight forward plan and align their missions with the objectives of Special Operations Command-Southern Command. They have two intermediate objectives, the first of which is to counter transnational organized crime and the second is maintaining positive U.S. military influence of the developing Colombian forces. They do the latter by building the capacity within the forces to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, deterring and disrupting violent extremist organizations and defeating attacks by those organizations.

Recently another key task was added to the team's focus — assisting with the demobilization effort by encouraging members of the VEOs to disassociate themselves from their organizations.

"We are doing everything from messaging with printed products to radio broadcasts," explained Valentine, who noted the Colombian security forces have developed the ability to conduct influence messaging.

"We support them when they have problems."

The demobilization program has been successful over the past few years. More than 8,000,000 leaflets have gone out over the last years, which have had a direct impact on the problem. According to Valentine at least 290 demobs from the FARC have been a direct result of the campaign. The campaign's focus is based on what the individual is missing by his association with the FARC or the drug traffickers. It encourages participants to come home and be a part of their family.

The MIST also works closely with the Government of Colombia in countering recruitment of young children by the FARC.

"This is a very tough task. We have worked closely with Colombian forces to determine who the FARC is targeting, what makes them effective and the demographic they are after," explained Valentine.

They have found that the FARC is currently targeting two groups for recruitment — children ages 6-11 and 12-18. To defeat these recruitment efforts, the MIST, working with the Colombian PSYOP, U.S. MILGRP Information Operation and CMSE is becoming a presence in the areas where the FARC recruits. They go in to these areas using any messaging mediums available to get the message to the at-risk children.

A successful campaign that the MIST supports is the MILGRP Information Operations' "YO SOY" or "I am" campaign which focuses on the hopes and dreams of the families in the community. The campaign addresses the fact that the children are more than a tool of the FARC and puts an emphasis on family. The "YO SOY" program strengthens the whole-of-government approach through regional meetings and engages regional civilian, military officials as well as national-level agencies including the office of the vice-president and president. Also of importance are campaigns against high-value individuals. These campaigns have also proven fairly successful, with the killing of the FARC's leader Alfonso Cano in November 2011. Valentine said that information related to Cano's location was derived from citizens who were influenced by the campaign to report.

AIRBORNE U.S. Army Special Forces Soldiers and their Colombian counterparts practice drills prior to a joint airborne operation at the Tolemaida Military Base in Melgar. *US Army photo*

The Way Ahead

Lt. Col. Will Griego, the U.S. Special Operations Command liason to the Colombian Joint Special Operations Command and by default the adhoc SOF USMLGRP mission chief, like many senior SOF officers who served in the 7th SFG(A), has a lot of history on which to base his view of Colombia.

Griego's first deployment to Colombia was in 1994 and he has been in out of the country since that time. That has been the case with a number of SOF officers and NCOs during the U.S. Army's 50 plus years in Colombia.

"Historically, the U.S. SOF presence in Colombia began in 1959," explained Griego. "A special team conducted a survey of the country at the request of the Colombian president who was looking for a way to defeat some of the splinter groups in the country. On Feb. 2, 1962, Maj. Gen. William Yarborough (then the commander of the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center) came to Colombia to conduct a pre-deployment site survey. Part of that trip was to discuss how the U.S. could help the Colombians defeat emerging threats following the violence of the 1940s and 1950s, which was known as La Violencia."

In the '60s, the U.S. SOF presence in Colombia consisted of military trainers, information ops and Civil Affairs.

"If you are looking at what we are doing today, it's not the first time," he said. "When the U.S. focus turned to Vietnam, we lost a lot of the groundwork we had laid in Colombia. The same thing happened following 9/11."

Griego noted that in 1998, Colombia was on the verge of being considered a failed state.

"Colombia's resurgence from the brink of becoming a failed narco-state in the late '90s to the second strongest economy in South America is due in no small part to a rich history of USSOF efforts in Colombia," said Griego. "These efforts demonstrate the huge returns on investment that come from an enduring USSOF-embedded partnership, and serve as a model that should be studied and replicated in other parts of the world.

"This is a case study in how you can turn around a country in less than 10 years when you have the military and political will converging," said Griego, pointing to the transformation of the Colombian military in the late '90s and the influx of U.S. dollars in early 2000.

Up until 9/11, no Plan Colombia-funds allocated by the U.S. government could be used directly to fight the FARC and other emerging threats; money could only be used to counter the growth of illicit narcotics. Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, President George W. Bush signed the National Security Presidential Security Presidential Directive 18 that allowed the money to be used to target the insurgent group, which was being funded through narcotic activities.

Griego recalls that in the early '90s, the Colombian military was ill-prepared to deal with its adversaries.

"When I got here the conscripts of soldiers were patrolling in the same shoes they got when they joined. Very few had weapons. They patrolled with sticks or knives," he said. "Today,

HIT ME WITH YOUR BEST SHOT A U.S. Army Special Forces Soldier trains Colombian National Police Junglas in marksmanship instruction at the Colombian National Police Training Center in Epinal. *US Army photo*

you will see the conscripts are well equipped — although their equipment is very different from our SOF forces — everyone has a standard issue. I jokingly tell the Colombian soldiers there are no poor soldiers when they have two cell phones and throw away the leftover rice. That is definitely a sign that the hard days are long gone. The Colombian Army is definitely one of the better equipped and trained forces in region, and it definitely has the most experience."

What is lacking is sustainment, which will ensure that both the Colombian Military and, as importantly, the Colombian National Police have the training they need to secure the peace.

"Colombia has one of the most militarized police forces in the world and the military is doing a lot of policing," said Griego. "Look at the number of police in Colombia — the ratio of police to citizen is like 50 to 1 — so there is definitely a shortage of law enforcement."

"Soldiers run into problems in remote areas because in some instances, they are the only government presence. If a couple is having a fight, the lady can go to the soldier but he has never been trained on settling domestic disputes. He is in a very difficult position. If he does nothing, the government is neglecting its role. And if what he does is not done in accordance with the law, than the soldier can be charged."

Griego said that is why the rural police are having such a positive impact in the country. "There are just not enough of them. Historically, in certain areas although the police presence hasn't been very significant because they have always been outgunned and outmanned. We have made a significant impact there through our training."

The hands-on training for both the Colombian military and the national police falls to the Soldiers of the 7th SFG(A). In a recent deployment, that task fell to the men of ODA 7313, who trained the Junglas and the Carabaneros at the Colombian National Police Training Center in Espinal. The team also served as the trainers in the NAS-sponsored joint training between the police and the military.

The ODA has found the Colombian forces to be very focused and very committed to the mission. Capt. Matthew Wood, the team leader, noted that his men were able to share experiences and knowledge from their deployments to Afghanistan with the Colombian forces that then took that information and looked at the ways they were fighting.

The team looked at the strengths and the weaknesses of the forces and zeroed in on some key areas of training including assault planning, after-action reviews, rehearsals, mission training and training in core fundamentals.

"These guys are very motivated and can do anything with almost nothing," said Wood. "But they are lacking in some core training, on which we were able to focus."

There is also a lack of a professional NCO corps. According to Wood, the majority of the soldiers are specialist who are more than

capable of following direction, but lack the NCO leadership. "We are really encouraging them to use their NCOs more," said Wood.

Griego added that Colombia has a rank called professional soldier. These men will never be sergeants or leaders. In his words, they "check the block and move on."

Part of the problem is the lack of established training cycles.

"These guys are always deployed, so it makes it difficult to establish that professional force," said Griego.

Wood and his men found this to be true when they worked on basics like marksmanship. "In years past when there was a continuous U.S. presence, this probably wasn't a problem," said Wood. "But over the past 11 years, with our focus on Afghanistan, the force was lucky to get a team for three months at a time, and then not see anyone again for a year. We hope that we can put the emphasis here again."

They also hope that through ongoing instruction they can create a corps of Colombian trainers who can ensure that the core skills stay fresh within the force. "There is a much greater need for training than what 10 guys can do," said Wood.

"The SF cadre we have is great, but it's very small compared to the size of the Colombian force, which is around 240, 000," said Griego. "Even at that, no one is offering more direct support to the Colombian effort than are the Soldiers of the 7th SF Group."

Griego sees U.S. SOF's way ahead in Colombia in the near future as a time of refocusing.

"In the '90s we had a large footprint here with at least one or two battalions on the ground," he said. "With the shift in focus to Afghanistan and Iraq, we did, somewhat drop our guard, leaving only one or two operational detachments in Colombia. At that time, 7th Group was the premier foreign-internal defense group in the world. We never had to use interpreters. We were very tuned into the culture. Now we are lucky to have one or two proficient or native speakers on the teams. We are again righting the ship, in the sense that we are providing the right assistance."

He sees the role of Special Forces as expanding in support of building the capacity of the Colombian military to defeat the FARC, with the CMSE and MIST continuing to work the non-lethal missions of trying to separate the FARC from the population. Of utmost importance is ensuring the nesting of all SOF operations in support of the country team.

As Colombian forces gain momentum and news coming out of the country reflects a more positive picture, it becomes harder for people to understand the U.S. presence in the country.

"The Colombian minister of defense said it best," said Griego. "He said, 'The hardest thing I have to do is to win a war that people think is already won."

Noting the reduction in FARC numbers and the increase in security, people feel that they can move freely. "This has given them a false perception that the FARC was defeated, but that isn't the case," said Griego.

The end game can only be the defeat of the FARC rather through attrition or negotiation. "Again, the minister of defense uses a soccer analogy when talking about the end state. He explains that if we score two goals in the first 75 minutes, and we drop our guard in the last 15 minutes and the opponent scores, the momentum changes and they could tie the game. In the Government of Colombia's eyes, a tie is a loss. There are only three possible outcomes: the government via military and other agencies defeats the FARC; the FARC reaches strategic goal of taking power; or it's a tie.

> "There are only three possible outcomes: the government via military and other agencies defeats the FARC; the FARC reaches its strategic goal of taking power or it's a tie ... There is only one option, the defeat of the FARC."

"It's very clear that the FARC will never win. If it becomes a tie, victory by default goes to the FARC. There is only one option, which is to defeat the FARC," continued Griego. "In order for them to do that, we have to continue to help them reach that next level through persistent engagement, sharing of tactics, techniques and procedures. The Colombian forces can now conduct unilateral operations against the FARC because of the training we have provided them. We are completely embedded in mission training, battle tracking, assisting and advising and providing the right weapons. Now we have to work on sustainment." **SW**

Janice Burton is the editor of Special Warfare.

comment here

Notes

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